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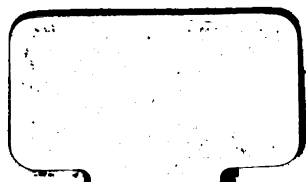
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*H. B. Sanborn*

Modern Essays. No. 1.

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HEINRICH HEINE.

BY

MATTHEW ARNOLD.



PHILADELPHIA:  
FREDERICK LEYPOLDT.  
NEW YORK: F. W. CHRISTERN.  
1863.



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BY

MATTHEW ARNOLD.

Reprint from the Cornhill Magazine, (August, 1863.)



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His (Matthew Arnold's) essays have been among the most brilliant things going;—they might be cited as among the best examples we have of real essay-writing amid the acres of twaddle which assume the name.—*The London Reader*.

The paper of this month (August, 1863) is a notice of *Heinrich Heine* by Mr. Arnold, one of those exquisite morsels of criticism, expressed in the clearest of words, which only he can write.—*London Athenæum*.





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## Heinrich Heine.

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“I KNOW not if I deserve that a laurel-wreath should one day be laid on my coffin. Poetry, dearly as I have loved it, has always been to me but a divine plaything. I have never attached any great value to poetical fame; and I trouble myself very little whether people praise my verses or blame them. But lay on my coffin a *sword*: for I was a brave soldier in the war of liberation of humanity.”

Heine had his full share of love of fame, and cared quite as much as his brethren of the *genus irritabile* whether people praised his verses or blamed them. And he was a very little of a hero. Posterity will certainly decorate his tomb with the emblem of the laurel rather than with the emblem of the sword. Still, for his contemporaries, for us, for the Europe of the present century, he is

significant chiefly for the reason which he himself in the words just quoted assigns. He is significant because he was, if not pre-eminently a brave, yet a brilliant, a most effective soldier in the war of liberation of humanity.

To ascertain the master current in the literature of an epoch, and to distinguish this from all minor currents, is the critic's highest function; in discharging it he shows how far he possesses the most indispensable quality of his office—justness of spirit. The living writer who has done most to make England acquainted with German authors, a man of genius, but to whom precisely this one quality of justness of spirit is perhaps wanting,—I mean Mr. Carlyle,—seems to me in the result of his labours on German literature to afford a proof how very necessary to the critic this quality is. Mr. Carlyle has spoken admirably of Goethe; but then Goethe stands before all men's eyes, the manifest centre of German literature; and from this central source many rivers flow. Which of these rivers is the main stream? which of the courses of spirit which we see active in Goethe is the course

which will most influence the future, and attract and be continued by the most powerful of Goethe's successors?—that is the question. Mr. Carlyle attaches, it seems to me, far too much importance to the romantic school of Germany—Tieck, Novalis, Jean Paul Richter,—and gives to these writers, really gifted as two, at any rate, of them are, an undue prominence. These writers, and others with aims and a general tendency the same as theirs, are not the real inheritors and continuators of Goethe's power; the current of their activity is not the main current of German literature after Goethe. Far more in Heine's works flows this main current; Heine, far more than Tieck or Jean Paul Richter, is the continuator of that which, in Goethe's varied activity, is the most powerful and vital; on Heine, of all German authors who survived Goethe, incomparably the largest portion of Goethe's mantle fell. I do not forget that when Mr. Carlyle was dealing with German literature, Heine, though he was clearly risen above the horizon, had not shown forth with all his strength; I do not forget, too, that after ten or twenty years many things may

come out plain before the critic which before were hard to be discerned by him ; and assuredly no one would dream of imputing it as a fault to Mr. Carlyle that twenty years ago he mistook the central current in German literature, overlooked the rising Heine, and attached undue importance to that romantic school which Heine was to destroy ; one may rather note it as a misfortune, sent perhaps as a delicate chastisement to a critic, who—man of genius as he is, and no one recognizes his genius more admiringly than I do—has, for the functions of the critic, a little too much of the self-will and eccentricity of a genuine son of Great Britain.

Heine is noteworthy, because he is the most important German successor and continuator of Goethe in Goethe's most important line of activity. And which of Goethe's lines of activity is this? His line of activity as "a soldier in the war of liberation of humanity."

Heine himself would hardly have admitted this affiliation, though he was far too powerful-minded a man to decry, with some of the vulgar German liberals, Goethe's genius. "The wind of the Paris Revolution," he writes

after the three days of 1830, "blew about the candles a little in the dark night of Germany, so that the red curtains of a German throne or two caught fire; but the old watchmen, who do the police of the german kingdoms, are already bringing out the fire-engines, and will keep the candles closer snuffed for the future. Poor, fast-bound German people, lose not all heart in thy bonds! The fashionable coating of ice melts off from my heart, my soul quivers and my eyes burn, and that is a disadvantageous state of things for a writer, who should control his subject-matter and keep himself beautifully objective, as the artistic school would have us, and as Goethe has done; he has come to be eighty years old doing this, and minister, and in good condition—poor German people! that is thy greatest man!"

But hear Goethe himself: "If I were to say what I had really been to the Germans in general, and to the young German poets in particular, I should say I had been their *Liberator*."

Modern times find themselves with an immense system of institutions, established facts,

accredited dogmas, customs, rules, which have come to them from times not modern. In this system their life has to be carried forward, yet they have a sense that this system is not of their own creation, that it by no means corresponds exactly with the wants of their actual life, that, for them, it is customary, not rational. The awakening of this sense is the awakening of the modern spirit. The modern spirit is now awake almost everywhere; the sense of want of correspondence between the forms of modern Europe and its spirit, between the new wine of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and the old bottles of the eleventh and twelfth centuries, or even of the sixteenth and seventeenth, almost every one now perceives; it is no longer dangerous to affirm that this want of correspondence exists; people are even beginning to be shy of denying it. To remove this want of correspondence is beginning to be the settled endeavour of most persons of good sense. Dissolvents of the old European system of dominant ideas and facts we must all be, all of us who have any power of working; what we have to study is that we may not be acrid dissolvents of it.

And how did Goethe, that grand dissolvent in an age when there were fewer of them than at present, proceed in his task of dissolution, of liberation of the modern European from the old routine? He shall tell us himself. "Through me the German poets have become aware that, as man must live from within outwards, so the artist must work from within outwards, seeing that, make what contortions he will, he can only bring to light his own individuality. I can clearly mark where this influence of mine has made itself felt; there arises out of it a kind of poetry of Nature, and only in this way is it possible to be original."

My voice shall never be joined to those which decry Goethe, and if it is said that the foregoing is a lame and impotent conclusion to Goethe's declaration that he had been the liberator of the Germans in general, and of the young German poets in particular, I say it is not. Goethe's profound, imperturbable naturalism is absolutely fatal to all routine thinking; he puts the standard, once for all, inside every man instead of outside him; when he is told, such a thing must be so, there is



immense authority and custom in favour of its being so, it has been held to be so for a thousand years, he answers with Olympian politeness, "*But is it so? is it so to me?*" Nothing could be more really subversive of the foundations on which the old European order rested; and it may be remarked that no persons are so radically detached from this order, no persons so thoroughly modern, as those who have felt Goethe's influence most deeply. If it is said that Goethe professes to have in this way deeply influenced but a few persons, and those persons poets, one may answer that he could have taken no better way to secure, in the end, the ear of the world; for poetry is simply the most beautiful, impressive, and widely effective mode of saying things, and hence its importance. Nevertheless the process of liberation, as Goethe worked it, though sure, is undoubtedly slow; he came, as Heine says, to be eighty years old in thus working it, and at the end of that time the old Middle-Age machine was still creaking on, the thirty German courts and their chamberlains subsisted in all their glory; Goethe himself was



a minister, and the visible triumph of the modern spirit over prescription and routine seemed as far off as ever. It was the year 1830; the German sovereigns had passed the preceding fifteen years in breaking the promises of freedom they had made to their subjects when they wanted their help in the final struggle with Napoleon. Great events were happening in France; the revolution, defeated in 1815, had arisen from its defeat, and was wresting from its adversaries the power. Heinrich Heine, a young man of genius, born at Hamburg, and with all the culture of Germany, but by race a Jew; with warm sympathies for France, whose revolution had given to his race the rights of citizenship, and whose rule had been, as is well known, popular in the Rhine provinces, where he passed his youth; with a passionate admiration for the great French Emperor, with a passionate contempt for the sovereigns who had overthrown him, for their agents, and for their policy—Heinrich Heine was in 1830 in no humour for any such gradual process of liberation from the old order of things as that which Goethe had followed. His counsel was

for open war. With that terrible modern weapon, the pen, in his hand, he passed the remainder of his life in one fierce battle. What was that battle? the reader will ask. It was a life and death battle with Philistinism.

*Philistinism*—we have not the expression in English. Perhaps we have not the word because we have so much of the thing. At Soli, I imagine, they did not talk of solecisms; and here, at the very headquarters of Goliath, nobody talks of Philistinism. The French have adopted the term *épicier*, grocer, to designate the sort of being whom the Germans designate by the term Philistine; but the French term—besides that it casts a slur upon a respectable class, composed of living and susceptible members, while the original Philistines are dead and buried long ago—is really, I think, in itself much less apt and expressive than the German term. Efforts have been made to obtain in English some term equivalent to *Philister* or *épicier*; Mr. Carlyle has made several such efforts: “Respectability with its thousand gigs,” he says;—well, the occupant of every one of those gigs is, Mr. Carlyle means, a Philistine. How-

ever, the word *respectable* is far too valuable a word to be thus perverted from its proper meaning; if the English are ever to have a word for the thing we are speaking of—and so prodigious are the changes which the modern spirit is introducing, that even we English shall perhaps one day come to want such a word—I think we had much better take the term *Philistine* itself.

*Philistine* must have originally meant, in the mind of those who invented the nickname, a strong, dogged, unenlightened opponent of the chosen people, of the children of the light. The party of change, the would-be remodelers of the old traditional European order, the invokers of reason against custom, the representatives of the modern spirit in every sphere where it is applicable, regarded themselves, with the robust self-confidence natural to reformers, as a chosen people, as children of the light. They regarded their adversaries as humdrum people, slaves to routine, enemies to the light; stupid and oppressive, but at the same time very strong. This explains the love which Heine, that Paladin of the modern spirit, has for France; it explains the

preference which he gives to France over Germany: "The French," he says, "are the chosen people of the new religion, its first gospels and dogmas have been drawn up in their language; Paris is the new Jerusalem, and the Rhine is the Jordan which divides the consecrated land of freedom from the land of the Philistines." He means that the French, as a people, have shown more accessibility to ideas than any other people; that prescription and routine have had less hold upon them than upon any other people; that they have shown most readiness to move and to alter at the bidding (real or supposed) of reason. This explains, too, the detestation which Heine had for the English: "I might settle in England," he says in his exile, "if it were not that I should find there two things, coal-smoke and Englishmen; I cannot abide either." What he hated in the English was the "ächt-britische Beschränktheit," as he calls it—the *genuine British narrowness*. In truth, the English, profoundly as they have modified the old Middle-Age order, great as is the liberty which they have secured for themselves, have in all their changes pro-

ceeded, to use a familiar expression, by the rule of thumb; what was intolerably inconvenient to them they have suppressed, and as they have suppressed it not because it was irrational, but because it was practically inconvenient, they have seldom in suppressing it appealed to reason, but always, if possible, to some precedent, or form, or letter, which served as a convenient instrument for their purpose, and which saved them from the necessity of recurring to general principles. They have thus become, in a certain sense, of all people the most inaccessible to ideas, and the most impatient of them; inaccessible to them because of their want of familiarity with them, and impatient of them because they have got on so well without them; that they despise those who, not having got on so well as themselves, still make a fuss for what they themselves have done so well without. But there has certainly followed from hence, in this country, somewhat of a general depression of pure intelligence: Philistia has come to be thought by us the true Land of Promise, and it is anything but that; the born lover of ideas, the born hater of com-

monplaces, must feel, in this country, that the sky over his head is of brass and iron. The enthusiast for the idea, for reason, values reason, the idea, in and for themselves; he values them, irrespectively of the practical conveniences which their triumph may obtain for him; and the man who regards the possession of these practical conveniences as something sufficient in itself, something which compensates for the absence or surrender of the idea, of reason, is, in his eyes, a Philistine. This is why Heine so often and so mercilessly attacks the liberals; much as he hates conservatism he hates Philistinism even more, and whoever attacks conservatism itself ignobly, not as a child of light, not in the name of the idea, is a Philistine. Our Cobbett is thus for him, much as he disliked our clergy and aristocracy whom Cobbett attacked, a Philistine with six fingers on every hand, and on every foot six toes, four-and-twenty in number: a Philistine, the staff of whose spear is like a weaver's beam. Thus he speaks of him:

While I translate Cobbett's words, the man himself comes bodily before my mind's eye, as

I saw him at that uproarious dinner at the Crown and Anchor Tavern, with his scolding red face and his radical laugh, in which venomous hate mingles with a mocking exultation at his enemies' surely approaching downfall. He is a chained cur, who falls with equal fury on every one whom he does not know, often bites the best friend of the house in his calves, barks incessantly, and just because of this incessantness of his barking cannot get listened to, even when he barks at a real thief. Therefore, the distinguished thieves who plunder England do not think it necessary to throw the growling Cobbett a bone to stop his mouth. This makes the dog furiously savage, and he shows all his hungry teeth. Poor old Cobbett! England's dog! I have no love for thee: for every vulgar nature my soul abhors; but thou touchest me to the inmost soul with pity, as I see how thou strainest in vain to break loose and to get at those thieves, who make off with their booty before thy very eyes, and mock at thy fruitless springs and thine impotent howling.

But, in 1830, Heine very soon found that the fire-engines of the German governments were too much for his direct efforts at incendiarism. "What demon drove me," he cries, "to write my *Reisebilder*, to edit a newspaper, to plague myself with our time and

its interests, to try and shake the poor German Hodge out of his thousand years' sleep in his hole? What good did I get by it? Hodge opened his eyes, only to shut them again immediately; he yawned, only to begin snoring again the next minute louder than ever; he stretched his stiff ungainly limbs, only to sink down again directly afterwards, and lie like a dead man in the old bed of his accustomed habits. I must have rest; but where am I to find a resting-place? In Germany I can no longer stay."

This is Heine's jesting account of his own efforts to rouse Germany: now for his pathetic account of them; it is because he unites so much wit with so much pathos that he is so effective a writer:

The Emperor Charles the fifth sate in sore straits, in the Tyrol, encompassed by his enemies. All his knights and courtiers had forsaken him; not one came to his help. I know not if he had at that time the cheese face with which Holbein has painted him for us. But I am sure that under-lip of his, with its contempt for mankind, stuck out even more than it does in his portraits. How could he but condemn the tribe which in the sunshine of his



prosperity had fawned on him so devotedly, and now, in his dark distress, left him all alone? Then suddenly his door opened, and there came in a man in disguise, and, as he threw back his cloak, the Kaiser recognized in him his faithful Conrad von der Rosen, the court jester. This man brought him comfort and counsel, and he was the court jester!

O German fatherland! dear German people! I am thy Conrad von der Rosen. The man whose proper business was to amuse thee, and who in good times should have catered only for thy mirth, makes his way into thy prison in time of need; here under my cloak, I bring thee thy sceptre and crown; dost thou not recognize me, my Kaiser? If I cannot free thee, I will at least comfort thee, and thou shalt at least have one with thee who will prattle with thee about thy sorest affliction, and whisper courage to thee, and love thee, and whose best joke and best blood shall be at thy service. For thou, my people, art the true Kaiser, the true lord of the land; thy will is sovereign, and more legitimate far than that purple *Tel est notre plaisir*, which invokes a divine right with no better warrant than the anointings of shaven and shorn jugglers; thy will, my people, is the sole rightful source of power. Though now thou liest down in thy bonds, yet in the end will thy rightful cause prevail; the day of deliverance is at hand, a new time is beginning. My Kaiser,

the night is over, and out there glows the ruddy dawn.

"Conrad von der Rosen, my fool, thou art mistaken; perhaps thou takest a headsman's gleaming axe for the sun, and the red of dawn is only blood."

'No, my Kaiser, it is the sun, though it is rising in the west; these six thousand years it has always risen in the east; it is high time there should come a change.'

"Conrad von der Rosen, my fool, thou hast lost the bells out of thy red cap, and it has now such an odd look, that red cap of thine!"

'Ah, my Kaiser, thy distress has made me shake my head so hard and fierce, that the fool's bells have dropped off my cap; the cap is none the worse for that!'

"Conrad von der Rosen, my fool, what is that noise of breaking and cracking outside there?"

'Hush! that is the saw and the carpenter's axe, and soon the doors of thy prison will be burst open, and thou wilt be free, my Kaiser!'

"Am I then really Kaiser? Ah, I forgot, it is the fool who tells me so!"

'Oh, sigh not, my dear master, the air of thy prison makes thee so desponding: when once thou hast got thy rights again, thou wilt feel once more the bold imperial blood in thy veins, and thou wilt be proud like a Kaiser, and violent, and gracious, and unjust, and smiling, and ungrateful, as princes are.'

"Conrad von der Rosen, my fool, when I am free, what wilt thou do then?"

'I will then sew new bells on to my cap.'

"And how shall I recompense thy fidelity?"

'Ah, dear master, by not leaving me to die in a ditch!'

I wish to mark Heine's place in modern European literature, the scope of his activity, and his value. I cannot attempt to give here a detailed account of his life, or a description of his separate works. In May, 1831, he went over his Jordan, the Rhine, and fixed himself in his new Jerusalem, Paris. There, thenceforward, he lived, going in general to some French watering-place in the summer, but making only one or two short visits to Germany during the rest of his life. His works, in verse and prose, succeeded each other without stopping; a collected edition of them, filling seven closely-printed octavo volumes, has been published in America; in the collected edition of few people's works is there so little to skip. Those who wish for a single good specimen of him should read his first important work, the work which made his reputation, the *Reisebilder*, or "Travelling

Sketches ;"\* prose and verse, wit and seriousness, are mingled in it, and the mingling of these is characteristic of Heine, and is nowhere to be seen practised more naturally and happily than in his *Reisebilder*. In 1847 his health, which till then had always been perfectly good, gave way. He had a kind of paralytic stroke. His malady proved to be a softening of the spinal marrow: it was incurable; it made rapid progress. In May, 1848, not a year after his first attack, he went out of doors for the last time; but his disease took more than eight years to kill him. For nearly eight years he lay helpless on a couch, with the use of his limbs gone, wasted almost to the proportions of a child, wasted so that a woman could carry him about; the sight of one eye lost, that of the other greatly dimmed, and requiring, that it might be exercised, to have the palsied eyelid lifted and held up by the finger; all this, and suffering, besides this, at short intervals, paroxysms of nervous agony. I have said he was not pre-eminently brave; but in the

\* Pictures of Travel. Translated by Charles G. Leland. Fourth edition. F. Leyboldt, Philadelphia, 1868.

astonishing force of spirit with which he retained his activity of mind, even his gaiety, amid all this suffering, and went on composing with undiminished fire to the last, he was truly brave. Nothing could clog that aërial lightness. "Pouvez-vous siffler?" his doctor asked him one day, when he was almost at his last gasp;—"siffler," as every one knows, has the double meaning of *to whistle* and *to hiss*:—"Hélas! non," was his whispered answer; "pas même une comédie de M. Scribe!" M. Scribe is, or was, the favourite dramatist of the French Philistine. "My nerves," he said to some one who asked him about them in 1855, the year of the Great Exhibition in Paris, "my nerves are of that quite singularly remarkable miserableness of nature, that I am convinced they would get at the Exhibition the grand medal for pain and misery." He read all the medical books which treated of his complaint. "But," said he to some one who found him thus engaged, "what good this reading is to do me I don't know, except that it will qualify me to give lectures in heaven on the ignorance of doctors on earth about diseases of the spinal marrow."

What a matter of grim seriousness are our ailments to most of us! yet with this gaiety Heine treated his to the end. That end, so long in coming, came at last. Heine died on the 17th of February, 1856, at the age of fifty-eight. By his will he forbade that his remains should be transported to Germany. He lies buried in the cemetery of Montmartre, at Paris.

His direct political action was null, and this is neither to be wondered at nor regretted; direct political action is not the true function of literature, and Heine was a born man of letters. Even in his favourite France the turn taken by public affairs was not at all what he wished, though he read French politics by no means as we in England, most of us, read them. He thought things were tending there to the triumph of communism; and to a champion of the idea like Heine, what there is gross and narrow in communism was very repulsive. "It is all of no use," he cried on his death-bed, "the future belongs to our enemies, the Communists, and Louis Napoleon is their John the Baptist." "And yet"—he added with all his old love for that remark-

able entity, so full of attraction for him, so profoundly unknown in England, the French people—"do not believe that God lets all this go forward merely as a grand comedy. Even though the Communists deny him to-day, he knows better than they do, that a time will come when they will learn to believe in him." After 1831 his hopes of soon upsetting the German governments had died away, and his propagandism took another, a more truly literary, character. It took the character of an intrepid application of the modern spirit to literature. To the ideas with which the burning questions of modern life filled him, he made all his subject-matter minister. He touched all the great points in the career of the human race, and here he but followed the tendency of the wide culture of Germany; but he touched them with a wand which brought them all under a light where the modern eye cares most to see them, and here he gave a lesson to the culture of Germany,—so wide, so impartial, that it is apt to become slack and powerless, and to lose itself in its materials for want of a strong central idea round which to group all its ideas. So the

mystic and romantic school of Germany lost itself in the middle Ages, was overpowered by their influence, came to ruin by its vain dreams of renewing them. Heine, with a far profounder sense of the mystic and romantic charm of the Middle Age than Görres, or Brentano, or Arnim, Heine the chief romantic poet of Germany, is yet also much more than a romantic poet; he is a great modern poet, he is not conquered by the Middle Age, he has a talisman by which he can feel, along with but above the power of the fascinating Middle Age itself, the power of modern ideas.

A French critic of Heine thinks he has said enough in saying that Heine proclaimed in German countries, with beat of drum, the ideas of 1789, and that at the cheerful noise of his drum the ghosts of the Middle Age took to flight. But this is rather too French an account of the matter. Germany, that vast mine of ideas, had no need to import ideas, as such, from any foreign country; and if Heine had carried ideas, as such, from France into Germany, he would but have been carrying coals to Newcastle. But that for which France, far less meditative than

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Germany, is eminent, is the prompt, ardent, and practical application of an idea, when she seizes it, in all departments of human activity which admit it. And that in which Germany most fails, and by failing in which she appears so helpless and impotent, is just this practical application of her innumerable ideas. "When *Candide*," says Heine himself, "came to Eldorado, he saw in the streets a number of boys who were playing with gold-nuggets instead of marbles. This degree of luxury made him imagine that they must be the king's children, and he was not a little astonished when he found that in Eldorado gold-nuggets are of no more value than marbles are with us, and that the school-boys play with them. A similar thing happened to a friend of mine, a foreigner, when he came to Germany and first read German books. He was perfectly astounded at the wealth of ideas which he found in them; but he soon remarked that ideas in Germany are as plentiful as gold-nuggets in Eldorado, and that those writers whom he had taken for intellectual princes, were in reality only school-boys." Heine was, as he calls himself, a

"Child of the French Revolution," an "Initiator," because he vigorously assured the Germans that ideas were not counters or marbles, to be played with for their own sake; because he exhibited in literature modern ideas applied with the utmost freedom, clearness, and originality. And therefore he declared that the great task of his life had been the endeavour to establish a cordial relation between France and Germany. It is because he thus operates a junction between the French spirit and German ideas and German culture, that he founds something new, opens a fresh period, and deserves the attention of criticism far more than the German poets his contemporaries, who merely continue an old period till it expires. It may be predicted that in the literature of other countries, too, the French spirit is destined to make its influence felt as an element, in alliance with the native spirit, of novelty and movement, as it has made its influence felt in German literature; fifty years hence a critic in the *Cornhill Magazine* will be demonstrating to our grandchildren how the phenomenon has come to pass.

We in England, in our great burst of

literature during the first thirty years of the present century, had no manifestation of the modern spirit, as this spirit manifests itself in Goethe's works or Heine's. And the reason is not far to seek. We had neither the German wealth of ideas, nor the French enthusiasm for applying ideas. There reigned in the mass of the nation that inveterate inaccessibility, that Philistinism—to use the German nickname—which reacts even on the individual genius that is exempt from it. In our greatest literary epoch, that of the Elizabethan age, English society at large was accessible to ideas, was permeated by them, was vivified by them to a degree which has never been reached in England since. Hence the unique greatness in English literature of Shakspeare and his contemporaries; they were powerfully upheld by the intellectual life of their nation; they applied freely in literature the then modern ideas—the ideas of the Renaissance and the Reformation. A few years afterwards the great English middle class, the kernel of the nation, the class whose intelligent sympathy had upheld a Shakspeare, entered the prison of Puritanism,

and had the key turned on its spirit there for two hundred years. *He enlargeth a nation, says Job, and straiteneth it again.* In the literary movement of the beginning of the nineteenth century the signal attempt to apply freely the modern spirit was made in England by two members of the aristocratic class, Byron and Shelley. Aristocracies are, as such, naturally impenetrable by ideas; but their individual members have a high courage and a turn for breaking bounds; and a man of genius, who is the born child of the idea, happening to be born in the aristocratic ranks, chafes against the obstacles which prevent him from freely developing it. But Byron and Shelley did not succeed in their attempt freely to apply the modern spirit in English literature; they could not succeed in it; the resistance to baffle them, the want of intelligent sympathy to guide and uphold them, were too great. Their literary creation, compared with the literary creation of Shakspeare and Spenser, compared with the literary creation of Goethe and Heine, is a failure. The best literary creation of that time in England proceeded from men who did

not make the same bold attempt as Byron and Shelley. What, in fact, was the career of the chief English men of letters, their contemporaries? The greatest of them, Wordsworth, retired (in Middle-Age phrase) into a monastery. I mean, he plunged himself in the inward life, he voluntarily cut himself off from the modern spirit. Coleridge took to opium. Scott became the historiographer royal of feudalism. Keats passionately gave himself up to a sensuous genius, to his faculty for interpreting nature; and he died of consumption at twenty-five. Wordsworth, Scott, and Keats have left admirable works; far more solid and complete works than those which Byron and Shelley have left. But their works have this defect—they do not belong to that which is the main current of the literature of modern epochs, they do not apply modern ideas to life; they constitute, therefore, *minor currents*, and all other literary work of our day, however popular, which has the same defect, also constitutes but a minor current. Byron and Shelley will be long remembered, long after the inadequacy of their actual work is clearly recognized, for

their passionate, their Titanic effort to flow in the main stream of modern literature; their names will be greater than their writings; *stat magni nominis umbra*.

Heine's literary good fortune was greater than that of Byron or Shelley. His theatre of operations was Germany, whose Philistinism does not consist in her want of ideas, or in her inaccessibility to ideas, for she teems with them and loves them, but, as I have said, in her feeble and hesitating application of modern ideas to life. Heine's intense modernism, his absolute freedom, his utter rejection of stock classicism and stock romanticism, his bringing all things under the point of view of the nineteenth century, were understood and laid to heart by Germany, through virtue of her immense, tolerant intellectualism, much as there was in all Heine said to affront and wound Germany. The wit and ardent modern spirit of France Heine joined to the culture, the sentiment, the thought of Germany. This is what makes him so remarkable; his wonderful clearness, lightness, and freedom, united with such power of feeling and width of range. Is there anywhere

keener wit than in his story of the French abbé who was his tutor, and who wanted to get from him that *la religion* is French for *der Glaube*: "Six times did he ask me the question: 'Henry, what is *der Glaube* in French?' and six times, and each time with a greater burst of tears, did I answer him—'It is *le crédit*.' And at the seventh time, his face purple with rage, the infuriated examiner screamed out—'It is *la religion*;' and a rain of cuffs descended upon me, and all the other boys burst out laughing. Since that day I have never been able to hear *la religion* mentioned, without feeling a tremor run through my back and my cheeks grow red with shame." Or in that comment on the fate of Professor Saalfeld, who had been addicted to writing furious pamphlets against Napoleon, and who was a professor at Göttingen, a great seat, according to Heine, of pedantry and Philistinism:—"It is curious," says Heine, "the three greatest adversaries of Napoleon have all of them ended miserably. Castlereagh cut his own throat; Louis the Eighteenth rotted upon his throne; and Professor Saalfeld is still a professor at Göt-

tingen." It is impossible to go beyond that.

What wit, again, in that saying which every one has heard: "The Englishman loves liberty like his lawful wife, the Frenchman loves her like his mistress, the German loves her like his old grandmother." But the turn Heine gives to this incomparable saying is not so well known; and it is by that turn he shows himself the born poet he is, full of delicacy and tenderness, of inexhaustible resource, infinitely new and striking:—

And yet, after all, no one can ever tell how things may fall out. The grumpy Englishman, in an ill-temper with his wife, is capable of some day putting a rope round her neck, and taking her to be sold at Smithfield. The inconsistent Frenchman may become unfaithful to his adored mistress, and be seen fluttering about the Palais Royal after another. *But the German will never quite abandon his old grandmother*; he will always keep for her a nook by the chimney-corner, where she can tell her fairy stories to the listening children.

Is it possible to touch more delicately and happily both the weakness and the strength of Germany—pedantic, simple, enslaved, free, ridiculous, admirable Germany?



And Heine's verse—his *Lieder*? Oh, the comfort, after dealing with French people of genius, irresistibly impelled to try and express themselves in verse, launching out into a deep which destiny has sown with so many rocks for them—the comfort of coming to a man of genius, who finds in verse his freest and most perfect expression, whose voyage over the deep of poetry destiny makes smooth! After the rhythm, to us, at any rate, with the German paste in our composition, so deeply unsatisfying, of—

Ah! que me dites-vous, et que vous dit mon âme?  
Que dit le ciel à l'aube et la flamme à la flamme?

what a blessing to arrive at rhythms like—

Take, oh, take those lips away,  
That so sweetly were forsworn—

or—

Siehst sehr sterbeblässig aus,  
Doch getrost! du bist zu Haus—

in which one's soul can take pleasure! The magic of Heine's poetical form is incomparable; he chiefly uses a form of old German popular poetry, a ballad form, which has more rapidity and grace than any ballad form of ours; he employs this form with the most

exquisite lightness and ease, and yet it has at the same time the inborn fulness, pathos, and old-world charm of all true forms of popular poetry. Thus in Heine's poetry, too, one perpetually blends the impression of French modernism and clearness with that of German sentiment and fulness; and to give this blended impression is, as I have said, Heine's great characteristic. To feel it, one must read him; he gives it in his form as well as in his contents, and by translation I can only reproduce it so far as his contents give it. But even the contents of many of his poems are capable of giving a certain sense of it. Here, for instance, is a poem in which he makes his profession of faith to an innocent beautiful soul, a sort of Gretchen, the child of some simple mining people having their hut among the pines at the foot of the Hartz Mountains, who reproaches him with not holding the old articles of the Christian creed:—

Ah, my child, while I was yet a little boy,  
while I yet sate upon my mother's knee, I  
believed in God the Father, who rules up  
there in Heaven, good and great;

Who created the beautiful earth, and the beautiful men and women thereon; who ordained for sun, moon, and stars their courses.

When I got bigger, my child, I comprehended yet a great deal more than this, and comprehended, and grew intelligent; and I believe on the Son also;

On the beloved Son, who loved us, and revealed love to us; and for his reward, as always happens, was crucified by the people.

Now, when I am grown up, have read much, have travelled much, my heart swells within me, and with my whole heart I believe on the Holy Ghost.

The greatest miracles were of his working, and still greater miracles doth he even now work; he burst in sunder the oppressor's stronghold, and he burst in sunder the bondsman's yoke.

He heals old death-wounds, and renews the old right; all mankind are one race of noble equals before him.

He chases away the evil clouds and the dark cobwebs of the brain, which have spoilt love and joy for us, which day and night have loured on us.

A thousand knights, well harnessed, has the Holy Ghost chosen out to fulfil his will, and he has put courage into their souls.

Their good swords flash, their bright banners wave; what, thou wouldst give much, my child, to look upon such gallant knights?

Well, on me, my child, look ! kiss me, and  
look boldly upon me ! one of those knights of  
the Holy Ghost am I.\*

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\* Fir-tree with his dark-green fingers  
Taps upon the window low ;  
And the moon, a yellow listener,  
Casts within her sweetest glow.

Father, mother, both are sleeping,  
Near at hand their rest they take ;  
But we two in pleasant gossip,  
Keep each other long awake.

"That you pray, and much too often,  
Seems unlikely, I declare :  
On your lips there's a contraction  
Which was never born of prayer.

"Ah, that heartless, cold expression  
Terrifies me as I gaze ;  
Though a solemn sorrow darkens  
In your eyes their gentle rays.

"And I doubt if you believe in  
What is held for truth by most :  
Have you faith in God the Father,  
In the Son and Holy Ghost ?"

'Ah, my darling, when an infant  
By my mother's knee I stood,  
I believed in God the Father,  
He who rules us, great and good ;

'He who made the world so lovely,  
Gave man beauty, gave him force,  
And to sun and moon and planets  
Preappointed each their course.

One has only to turn over the pages of his  
*Romancero*—a collection of poems written in

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'As I older grew, my darling,  
And my way in wisdom won,  
I in reason comprehended  
And believe now in the Son,—

'In the well-loved Son, who, loving,  
Oped the gates of Love so wide,  
And for thanks—as is the custom—  
By the world was crucified.

'Now, at man's estate arriving,  
Full experience I boast,  
And, with heart expanded, truly  
I believe in the Holy Ghost,

'Who has worked the greatest wonders:  
Greater still he'll work again;  
He has broken tyrants' strong-holds,  
And he breaks the vassal's chain.

'Ancient deadly wounds still healing,  
He renews man's ancient right:  
All to him born free and equal,  
Are as nobles in his sight.

'Clouds of evil flee before him,  
And those cobwebs of the brain  
Which forbade us love and pleasure,  
Scowling grimly on our pain.

'And a thousand knights well weaponed  
Has he chosen and required  
To fulfil his holy bidding,  
All with noblest zeal inspired.

the first years of his illness, with his whole power and charm still in them, and not, like his latest poems of all, painfully touched by the air of his *Matrazzen-Gruft*, his mattress-grave—to see Heine's width of range; the most varied figures succeed one another, Rhampsinitus, Edith with the swan neck; Charles the First, Marie Antoinette, King David, a heroine of *Mabille*, Melisandra of Tripoli, Richard Cœur de Lion, Pedro the Cruel, Firdusi, Cortes, Dr. Döllinger; but never does Heine attempt to be *hübsch objectiv*, "beautifully objective," to become in spirit an old Egyptian, or an old Hebrew, or a Middle-Age knight, or a spanish adventurer, or an English royalist; he always remains Heinrich Heine, a son of the nineteenth century. To give you a notion of his tone I will

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'Lo! their precious swords are gleaming,  
And their banners wave in fight!  
What! you fain would see, my darling,  
Such a proud and noble knight?

'Well, then, gaze upon me, dearest;  
I am of that lordly host.  
Kiss me! I am an elected  
True knight of the Holy Ghost!"

*From the "Book of Songs," translated by Ch. G. Leland.*

quote a few stanzas at the end of the *Spanish Atridæ*, in which he describes, in the character of a visitor at the court of Henry of Transtamare at Segovia, Henry's treatment of the children of his brother, Pedro the Cruel. Don Diego Albuquerque, his neighbour, strolls after dinner through the castle with him :—

In the cloister-passage, which leads to the kennels where are kept the king's hounds, that with their growling and yelping let you know a long way off where they are,

There I saw, built into the wall, and with a strong iron grating for its outer face, a cell like a cage.

Two human figures sate therein, two young boys; chained by the leg, they crouched in the dirty straw.

Hardly twelve years old seemed the one, the other not much older; their faces fair and noble, but pale and wan with sickness.

They were all in rags, almost naked; and their lean bodies showed wounds, the marks of ill-usage; both of them shivered with fever.

They looked up at me out of the depth of their misery: "Who," I cried in horror to Don Diego, "are these pictures of wretchedness?"

Don Diego seemed embarrassed; he looked

round to see that no one was listening; then he gave a deep sigh, and at last, putting on the easy tone of a man of the world, he said:

"These are a pair of king's sons, who were early left orphans; the name of their father was King Pedro, the name of their mother Maria de Padilla.

"After the great battle of Navarette, when Henry of Transtamare had relieved his brother, King Pedro, of the troublesome burden of the crown,

"And likewise of that still more troublesome burden, which is called life, then Don Henry's victorious magnanimity had to deal with his brother's children.

"He has adopted them, as an uncle should; and he has given them free quarters in his own castle.

"The room which he has assigned to them is certainly rather small, but then it is cool in summer, and not intolerably cold in winter.

"Their fare is rye bread, which tastes as sweet as if the goddess Ceres had baked it express for her beloved Proserpine.

"Not unfrequently, too, he sends a scullion to them with garbanzos, and then the young gentlemen know that it is Sunday in Spain.

"But it is not Sunday every day, and garbanzos do not come every day; and the master of the hounds gives them the treat of his whip.

"For the master of the hounds, who has under his superintendence the kennels and the pack, and the nephews' cage also,



"Is the unfortunate husband of that lemon-faced woman with the white ruff, whom we remarked to-day at dinner.

"And she scolds so sharp, that often her husband snatches his whip, and rushes down here, and gives it to the dogs and to the poor little boys.

"But his majesty has expressed his disapproval of such proceedings, and has given orders that for the future his nephews are to be treated differently from the dogs.

"He has determined no longer to entrust the disciplining of his nephews to a mercenary stranger, but to carry it out with his own hands."

Don Diego stopped abruptly; for the seneschal of the castle joined us, and politely expressed his hope that we had dined to our satisfaction.

Observe how the irony of the whole of that, finishing with the grim innuendo of the last stanzas but one, is at once truly masterly and truly modern.

No account of Heine is complete which does not notice the Jewish element in him. His race he treated with the same freedom with which he treated everything else, but he derived a great force from it, and no one knew this better than himself. He has excellently

pointed out how in the sixteenth century there was a double renaissance—a Hellenic renaissance and a Hebrew renaissance—and how both have been great powers ever since. He himself had in him both the spirit of Greece and the spirit of Judea; both these spirits reach the infinite, which is the true goal of all poetry and all art—the Greek spirit of beauty, the Hebrew spirit of sublimity. By his perfection of literary form, by his love of clearness, by his love of beauty, Heine is Greek; by his intensity, by his untamableness, by his “longing which cannot be uttered,” he is a Hebrew. Yet what Hebrew ever treated the things of the Hebrews like this?—

There lives at Hamburg, in a one-roomed lodging in the Baker's Broad Walk, a man whose name is Moses Lump; all the week he goes about in wind and rain, with his pack on his back, to earn his few shillings; but when on Friday evening he comes home, he finds the candlestick with seven candles lighted, and the table covered with a fair white cloth, and he puts away from him his pack and his cares, and he sits down to table with his squinting wife and yet more squinting daughter, and eats fish with them, fish which has

been dressed in beautiful white garlic sauce, sings therewith the grandest psalms of King David, rejoices with his whole heart over the deliverance of the children of Israel out of Egypt, rejoices, too, that all the wicked ones who have done the children of Israel harm, have ended by taking themselves off; that King Pharoah, Nebuchadnezzar, Haman, Antiochus, Titus, and all such people are well dead, while he, Moses Lump, is yet alive, and eating fish with wife and daughter; and I can tell you, Doctor, the fish is delicate and the man is happy, he has no call to torment himself about culture, he sits contented in his religion and in his green bed-gown, like Diogenes in his tub, he contemplates with satisfaction his candles, which he on no account will snuff for himself; and I can tell you, if the candles burn a little dim, and the snuffers-woman, whose business it is to snuff them, is not at hand, and Rothschild the Great were at that moment to come in, with all his brokers, bill-discounters, agents, and chief clerks, with whom he conquers the world, and Rothschild were to say, "Moses Lump, ask of me what favour you will, and it shall be granted you;"—Doctor, I am convinced, Moses Lump would quietly answer, "Snuff me those candles!" and Rothschild the Great would exclaim with admiration, "If I were not Rothschild, I would be Moses Lump."

There Heine shows us his own people by its comic side ; in the poem of the *Princess Sabbath* he shows it to us by a more serious side. The Princess Sabbath, "the *tranquil Princess*, pearl and flower of all beauty, fair as the Queen of Sheba, Solomon's bosom friend, that blue-stocking from Ethiopia who wanted to shine by her *esprit*, and with her wise riddles made herself in the long run a bore" (with Heine the sarcastic turn is never far off), this princess has for her betrothed a prince whom sorcery has transformed into an animal of lower race, the Prince Israel.

A dog with the desires of a dog, he wallows all the week long in the filth and refuse of life, amidst the jeers of the boys in the street.

But every Friday evening, at the twilight hour, suddenly the magic passes off, and the dog becomes once more a human being.

A man with the feelings of a man, with head and heart raised aloft, in festal garb, in almost clean garb, he enters the halls of his Father.

"Hail, beloved halls of my royal Father! Ye tents of Jacob, I kiss with my lips your holy door-posts!"

Still more he shows us this serious side in

his beautiful poem on Jehuda ben Halevy, a poet belonging to "the great golden age of the Arabian, Old-Spanish, Jewish school of poets," a contemporary of the troubadours:—

He, too, the hero whom we sing, Jehuda ben Halevy, too, had his lady-love; but she was of a special sort.

She was no Laura, whose eyes, mortal stars, in the cathedral on Good Friday kindled that world-renowned flame.

She was no châtelaine, who in the blooming glory of her youth presided at tourneys, and awarded the victor's crown.

No casuistess in the Gay Science was she, no lady doctinaire, who delivered her oracles in the judgment-chamber of a Court of Love.

She, whom the Rabbi loved, was a woe-gone poor darling, a mourning picture of desolation; and her name was Jerusalem.

Jehuda ben Halevy, like the Crusaders, makes his pilgrimage to Jerusalem; and there amid the ruins, sings a song of Zion which has become famous among his people:—

That lay of pearled tears in the wide-famed Lament, which is sung in all the scattered tents of Jacob throughout the world,

On the ninth day of the month which is

called Ab, on the anniversary of Jerusalem's destruction by Titus Vespasianus.

Yes, that is the song of Sion, which Jehuda ben Halevy sang with his dying breath amid the holy ruins of Jerusalem.

Barefoot, and in penitential weeds, he sate there upon the fragment of a fallen column ; down to his breast fell,

Like a grey forest, his hair; and cast a weird shadow on the face which looked out through it, his troubled pale face, with the spiritual eyes.

So he sate and sang, like unto a seer out of the fore-time to look upon : Jeremiah, the Ancient, seemed to have risen out of his grave.

But a bold Saracen came riding that way, aloft on his barb, lolling in his saddle, and brandishing a naked javelin ;

Into the breast of the poor singer he plunged his deadly shaft, and shot away like a winged shadow.

Quietly flowed the Rabbi's life-blood, quietly he sang his song to an end ; and his last dying sigh was Jerusalem.

Nor must Heine's sweet note be unheard—his plaintive note, his note of melancholy. Here is a strain which came from him as he lay, in the winter night, on his "mattress-grave" at Paris, and let his thoughts wander

to Germany, "the great child, entertaining herself with her Christmas-tree." "Thou tookest,"—he cried to the German exile—

Thou tookest thy flight towards sunshine and happiness; naked and poor returnest thou back. German truth, German shirts,—one gets them worn to tatters in foreign parts.

Deadly pale are thy looks, but take comfort, thou art at home; one lies warm in German earth, warm as by the old pleasant fireside.

Many a one, alas! became crippled, and could get home no more: longingly he stretches out his arms; God have mercy upon him!

God have mercy upon him! for what remain of the days of the years of his life are few and evil. "Can it be that I still actually exist? My body is so shrunk that there is hardly anything of me left but my voice, and my bed makes me think of the melodious grave of the enchanter Merlin, which is in the forest of Broceliand in Brittany, under high oaks whose tops shine like green flames to heaven. Ah, I envy thee those trees, brother Merlin, and their fresh waving; for over my mattress-grave here in Paris no



green leaves rustle ; and early and late I hear nothing but the rattle of carriages, hammering, scolding, and the jingle of the piano. A grave without rest, death without the privileges of the departed, who have no longer any need to spend money, or to write letters, or to compose books. What a melancholy situation !”

He died, and has left a blemished name ; with his crying faults, his intemperate susceptibility, his unscrupulousness in passion, his inconceivable attacks on his enemies, his still more inconceivable attacks upon his friends, his want of generosity, his sensuality, his incessant mocking, how could it be otherwise ? Not only was he not one of Mr. Carlyle’s “ respectable ” people, he was profoundly disrespectful ; and not even the merit of not being a Philistine can make up for a man’s being that. To his intellectual deliverance there was an addition of something else wanting, and that something else was something immense ; the old-fashioned, laborious, eternally needful moral deliverance. Goethe says that he was deficient in *love* ; to me his weakness seems to be not so much a deficiency



in love as a deficiency in self-respect, in true dignity of character. But on this negative side of one's criticism of a man of great genius, I for my part, when I have once clearly marked that this negative side is and must be there, have no pleasure in dwelling. I prefer to say of Heine something positive. He is not an adequate interpreter of the modern world. He is only a brilliant soldier in the war of liberation of humanity. But, such as he is, he is (and posterity too, I am quite sure, will say this), in the European literature of that quarter of a century which follows the death of Goethe, incomparably the most important figure.

What a spendthrift, one is tempted to cry, is Nature! With what prodigality, in the march of generations, she employs human power, content to gather almost always little result from it, sometimes none! Look at Byron, that Byron whom the present generation of Englishmen are forgetting; Byron, the greatest natural force, the greatest elementary power, I cannot but think, which has appeared in our literature since Shakspeare. And what became of this wonderful production of nature?

He is shattered himself, he inevitably shattered himself to pieces, against the huge black, cloud-topped, interminable precipice of British Philistinism. But Byron, it, may be said, was eminent only by his genius, only by his inborn force and fire; he had not the intellectual equipment of a supreme modern poet; except for his genius he was an ordinary nineteenth-century English nobleman, with little culture and with no ideas. Well, then, look at Heine. Heine had all the culture of Germany; in his head fermented all the ideas of modern Europe. And what have we got from Heine? A half-result, for want of moral balance, and of nobleness of soul and character. That is what I say; there is so much power, so many seem able to run well, so many give promise of running well; so few reach the goal, so few are chosen. *Many are called, few chosen.*

## Extract from an Essay on Heinrich Heine,

PUBLISHED IN THE WESTMINSTER REVIEW OF  
JANUARY, 1856.\*

\* \* \* OUR sketch of Heine's life, which has been drawn from various sources, will be free from everything like intrusive gossip, and will derive its colouring chiefly from the autobiographical hints and descriptions scattered through his own writings. Those of our readers who happen to know nothing of Heine, will in this way be making their acquaintance with the writer while they are learning the outline of his career.

We have said that Heine was born with the present century; but this statement is not precise, for we learn that, according to his certificate of baptism, he was born December 12th, 1799. However, as he himself says, the important point is, that he was born, and born on the banks of the Rhine, at Düsseldorf, where his father was a merchant. \* \* \*

Heine's parents were apparently not wealthy, but his education was cared for by his uncle, Solomon Heine, a great banker in Hamburg, so that he had no early pecuniary disadvantages to struggle with. He seems to have been very happy in his mother, who was not of Hebrew, but of Teutonic blood; he often mentions her with reverence and affection, and in the

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\* Heine died on the 17th of February, 1856.

"Buch der Lieder" there are two exquisite sonnets addressed to her, which tell how his proud spirit was always subdued by the charm of her presence, and how her love was the home of his heart after restless weary ramblings. \* \* \*

He was at first destined for a mercantile life, but Nature declared too strongly against this plan. "God knows," he has lately said in conversation with his brother, "I would willingly have become a banker, but I could never bring myself to that pass. I very early discerned that bankers would one day be the rulers of the world." So commerce was at length given up for law, the study of which he began in 1819 at the University of Bonn. He had already published some poems in the corner of a newspaper, and among them was one on Napoleon, the object of his youthful enthusiasm. This poem, he says in a letter to St. René Taillandier, was written when he was only sixteen. It is still to be found in the "Buch der Lieder" under the title "Die Grenadiere,"\* and it proves that even in its earliest efforts his genius showed a strongly specific character. \* \* \*

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\* To the land of France went two grenadiers,  
From a Russian prison returning;  
But they hung down their heads on the German frontiers,  
The news from their fatherland learning.  
  
For there they both heard the sorrowful tale  
That France was by fortune forsaken;  
That her mighty army was scattered like hail,  
And the Emperor, the Emperor taken.

In 1820 Heine left Bonn for Göttingen. At the end of three months he was rusticated for a breach of the

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Then there wept together the grenadiers,  
The sorrowful story learning;  
And one said, "Oh, woe!" as the news he hears,  
"How I feel my old wound burning!"

The other said, "The song is sung,  
And I wish that we both were dying!  
But at home I've a wife and a child—they're young—  
On me, and me only, relying.

Yet what is a wife or a child to me?  
Deeper wants all my spirit have shaken:  
Let them beg, let them beg, should they hungry be!  
My Emperor, my Emperor taken!

But I beg you, brother, if by chance  
You soon shall see me dying,  
Then take my corpse with you back to France,—  
Let it ever in France be lying.

The cross of honor with crimson band  
Shall rest on my heart as it bound me;  
Give me my musket in my hand,  
And buckle my sword around me.

And there I will lie and listen still,  
In my sentry-coffin staying,  
Till I feel the thundering cannon's thrill,  
And horses trampling and neighing.

Then my Emperor will ride, well over my grave,  
Mid sabres bright slashing and smiting;  
And I'll rise all weaponed up out of my grave,—  
For the Emperor, the Emperor fighting."

laws against duelling. Whilst there, he had attempted a negotiation with Brockhaus for the printing of a volume of poems, and had endured the first ordeal of lovers and poets—a refusal. It was not until a year after, that he found a Berlin publisher for his first volume of poems, subsequently transformed, with additions, into the “*Buch der Lieder*.” He remained between two and three years at Berlin, and the society he found there seems to have made these years an important epoch in his culture. He was one of the youngest members of a circle which assembled at the house of the poetess Elise von Hohenhausen, the translator of Byron—a circle which included Chamisso, Varnhagen, and Rahel (Varnhagen’s wife). For Rahel, Heine had a profound admiration and regard; he afterwards dedicated to her the poems included under the title “*Heimkehr*,” and he frequently refers to her or quotes her in a way that indicates how he valued her influence. \* \* \*

In 1823, Heine returned to Göttingen to complete his career as a law-student, and this time he gave evidence of advanced mental maturity, not only by producing many of the charming poems subsequently included in the “*Reisebilder*,” but also by prosecuting his professional studies diligently enough to leave Göttingen, in 1825, as *Doctor juris*. Hereupon he settled at Hamburg as an advocate, but his profession seems to have been the least pressing of his occupations. In those days a small blond young man, with the brim of his hat down over his nose, his coat flying open, and his hands stuck in his trouser-pockets, might

be seen stumbling along the streets of Hamburg, staring from side to side, and appearing to have small regard to the figure he made in the eyes of the good citizens. Occasionally an inhabitant more literary than usual, would point out this young man to his companion as *Heinrich Heine*; but in general, the young poet had not to endure the inconveniences of being a lion. \* \* \*

It was, perhaps, in these Hamburg days that Heine paid the visit to Goethe, of which he gives us this charming little picture:

"When I visited him in Weimar, and stood before him, I involuntarily glanced at his side to see whether the eagle was not there with lightning in his beak. I was nearly speaking Greek to him; but, as I observed that he understood German, I stated to him in German, that the plums on the road between Jena and Weimar were very good. I had for so many long winter nights thought over what lofty and profound things I would say to Goethe, if ever I saw him. And when I saw him at last, I said to him, that the Saxon plums were very good! And Goethe smiled."

During the next few years, Heine produced the most popular of all his works—those which have won him his place as the greatest of living German poets and humorists. Between 1826 and 1829, appeared the four volumes of the "*Reisebilder*" (Pictures of Travel) and the "*Buch der Lieder*" (Book of Songs)—a volume of lyrics, of which it is hard to say whether their greatest charm is the lightness and finish of their style, their vivid and original imaginativeness, or their simple, pure sensibility. In his "*Reisebilder*," Heine carries us with him to the Harz, to the isle of Norderney, to

his native town Düsseldorf, to Italy, and to England, sketching scenery and character, now with the wildest, most fantastic humour, now with the finest idyllic sensibility—letting his thoughts wander from poetry to politics, from criticism to dreamy reverie, and blending fun, imagination, reflection, and satire in a sort of exquisite, ever-varying shimmer, like the hues of the opal.

Heine's journey to England did not at all heighten his regard for the English. He calls our language the "hiss of egoism" (*Zischlaute des Egoismus*); and his ridicule of English awkwardness is as merciless as—English ridicule of German awkwardness. His antipathy towards us seems to have grown in intensity, like many of his other antipathies; and in his "Vermischte Schriften" he is more bitter than ever. Let us quote one of his philippics; since bitters are understood to be wholesome:

"It is certainly a frightful injustice to pronounce sentence of condemnation on an entire people. But with regard to the English, momentary disgust might betray me into this injustice; and on looking at the mass, I easily forget the many brave and noble men who distinguished themselves by intellect and love of freedom. But these, especially the British poets, were always all the more glaringly in contrast with the rest of the nation; they were isolated martyrs to their national relations; and, besides, great geniuses do not belong to the particular land of their birth; they scarcely belong to this earth, the Golgotha of their sufferings. The mass—the English block-heads, God forgive me!—are hateful to me in my inmost soul; and I often regard them not at all as my fellow-men, but as miserable automata—machines, whose motive power is egoism. In these moods it seems to me as if I heard the whizzing wheel-work by which they think, feel,



reckon, digest, and pray: their praying, their mechanical Anglican church-going, with the gilt Prayer-book under their arms, their stupid, tiresome Sunday, their awkward piety, is most of all odious to me. I am firmly convinced that a blaspheming Frenchman is a more pleasing sight for the Divinity than a praying Englishman." \* \* \*

Since 1831 Paris has been Heine's home, and his best prose works have been written either to inform the Germans on French affairs or to inform the French on German philosophy and literature. He became a correspondent of the *Allgemeine Zeitung*, and his correspondence, which extends, with an interruption of several years, from 1831 to 1844, forms the volume entitled "Französische Zustände" (French Affairs), and the second and third volume of his "Vermischte Schriften." It is a witty and often wise commentary on public men and public events: Louis Philippe, Casimir Périer, Thiers, Guizot, Rothschild, the Catholic party, the Socialist party, have their turn of satire and appreciation, for Heine deals out both with an impartiality which made his less favourable critics—Börne, for example—charge him with the rather incompatible sins of reckless caprice and venality. Literature and art alternate with politics: we have now a sketch of George Sand, or a description of one of Horace Vernet's pictures—now a criticism of Victor Hugo, or of Liszt,—now an irresistible caricature of Spontini, or Kalkbrenner,—and occasionally the predominant satire is relieved by a fine saying or a genial word of admiration. And all is done with that airy lightness, yet precision of touch, which distinguishes Heine beyond any living writer. \* \* \*

For sixteen years—from 1831 to 1847—Heine lived that rapid concentrated life which is known only in Paris; but then, alas! stole on the “days of darkness” and they were to be many. In 1847 he felt the approach of the terrible spinal disease which has for seven years chained him to his bed in acute suffering. The last time he went out of doors, he tells us, was in May, 1848:—

“With difficulty I dragged myself to the Louvre, and I almost sank down as I entered that magnificent hall where the ever-blessed goddess of beauty, our beloved Lady of Milo, stands on her pedestal. At her feet I lay long, and wept so bitterly that a stone must have pitied me. The goddess looked compassionately on me, but at the same time disconsolately, as if she would say: Dost thou not see, then, that I have no arms, and thus cannot help thee?”

Since 1848, then, this poet, whom the lovely objects of Nature have always “haunted like a passion,” has not descended from the second story of a Parisian house; this man of hungry intellect has been shut out from all direct observation of life, all contact with society, except such as is derived from visitors to his sick-room. The terrible nervous disease has affected his eyes; the sight of one is utterly gone, and he can only raise the lid of the other by lifting it with his finger. Opium alone is the beneficent genius that stills his pain. We hardly know whether to call it an alleviation or an intensification of the torture that Heine retains his mental vigour, his poetic imagination, and his incisive wit; for if this intellectual activity fills up a blank, it widens the sphere of suffering. His brother described him in 1851 as still, in moments when the

hand of pain was not too heavy on him, the same Heinrich Heine, poet and satirist by turns. In such moments, he would narrate the strangest things in the gravest manner. But when he came to an end, he would roguishly lift up the lid of his right eye with his finger to see the impression he had produced; and if his audience had been listening with a serious face, he would break into Homeric laughter. We have other proof than personal testimony that Heine's disease allows his genius to retain much of its energy, in the "Romanzero," a volume of poems published in 1851, and written chiefly during the three first years of his illness; and in the first volume of the "Vermischte Schriften," also the product of recent years. \* \* \*

Heine is essentially a lyric poet. The finest products of his genius are

"Short swallow flights of song that dip  
Their wings in tears, and skim away;"

and they are so emphatically songs that, in reading them, we feel as if each must have a twin melody born in the same moment and by the same inspiration. Heine is too impressible and mercurial for any sustained production; even in his short lyrics his tears sometimes pass into laughter and his laughter into tears; and his longer poems, "Atta Troll" and "Deutschland," are full of Ariosto-like transitions. His song has a wide compass of notes; he can take us to the shores of the Northern Sea and thrill us by the sombre sublimity of his pictures and dreamy fancies; he can draw forth our tears by the voice he gives to our own sorrows, or to the sorrows of "Poor Peter;" he can

throw a cold shudder over us by a mysterious legend, a ghost story, or a still more ghastly rendering of hard reality; he can charm us by a quiet idyl, shake us with laughter at his overflowing fun, or give us a piquant sensation of surprise by the ingenuity of his transitions from the lofty to the ludicrous. This last power is not, indeed, essentially poetical; but only a poet can use it with the same success as Heine, for only a poet can poise our emotion and expectation at such a height as to give effect to the sudden fall. Heine's greatest power as a poet lies in his simple pathos, in the ever-varied but always natural expression he has given to the tender emotions. We may perhaps indicate this phase of his genius by referring to Wordsworth's beautiful little poem, "She Dwelt Among the Untrodden Ways;" the conclusion—

"She dwelt alone, and few could know  
When Lucy ceased to be;  
But she is in her grave, and, oh!  
The difference to me"—

is entirely in Heine's manner; and so is Tennyson's poem of a dozen lines, called "Circumstance." Both these poems have Heine's pregnant simplicity. But, lest this comparison should mislead, we must say that there is no general resemblance between either Wordsworth, or Tennyson, and Heine. Their greatest qualities lie quite away from the light, delicate lucidity, the easy, rippling music, of Heine's style. The distinctive charm of his lyrics may best be seen by comparing them with Goethe's. Both have the same masterly, finished simplicity and rhythmic grace; but there is

more thought mingled with Goethe's feeling—his lyrical genius is a vessel that draws more water than Heine's, and, though it seems to glide along with equal ease, we have a sense of greater weight and force accompanying the grace of its movement.

But, for this very reason, Heine touches our hearts more strongly; his songs are all music and feeling—they are like birds that not only enchant us with their delicious notes, but nestle against us with their soft breasts, and make us feel the agitated beating of their hearts. He indicates a whole sad history in a single quatrain: there is not an image in it, not a thought; but it is beautiful, simple, and perfect as a "big round tear"—it is pure feeling breathed in pure music:—

I at first was near despairing,  
Never thought to endure as now,  
And at length my grief I'm bearing;  
Only do not ask me how.

He excels equally in the more imaginative expression of feeling: he represents it by a brief image, like a finely-cut cameo; he expands it into a mysterious dream, or dramatizes it in a little story, half ballad, half idyl; and in all these forms his art is so perfect, that we never have a sense of artificiality or of unsuccessful effort; but all seems to have developed itself by the same beautiful necessity that brings forth vine-leaves and grapes and the natural curls of childhood. \* \* \*

As a prosaist, Heine is, in one point of view, even more distinguished than as a poet. \* \* \*

He is far more an artist in prose than Goethe. He has not the breadth and repose, and the calm develop-

ment which belong to Goethe's style, for they are foreign to his mental character ; but he excels Goethe in susceptibility to the manifold qualities of prose, and in mastery over its effects. Heine is full of variety ; of light and shadow : he alternates between epigrammatic pith, imaginative grace, sly allusion, and daring piquancy ; and athwart all these there runs a vein of sadness, tenderness, and grandeur which reveals the poet. He continually throws out those finely-chiselled sayings which stamp themselves on the memory, and become familiar by quotation. For example: "The people have time enough, they are immortal ; kings only are mortal."—"Wherever a great soul utters its thoughts, there is Golgotha."—"Nature wanted to see how she looked, and she created Goethe."—\* \* \*

The most poetic and specifically humorous of Heine's prose writings are the "Reisebilder." The comparison with Sterne is inevitable here ; but Heine does not suffer from it, for if he falls below Sterne in raciness of humour, he is far above him in poetic sensibility and in reach and variety of thought. Heine's humour is never persistent, it never flows on long in easy gaiety and drollery ; where it is not swelled by the tide of poetic feeling, it is continually dashing down the precipice of witticism. It is not broad and unctuous, it is ærial and sprite-like, a momentary resting-place between his poetry and his wit. In the "Reisebilder" he runs through the whole gamut of his powers, and gives us every hue of thought, from the wildly droll and fantastic to the sombre and the terrible.—\* \* \*



OCTOBER, 1863.

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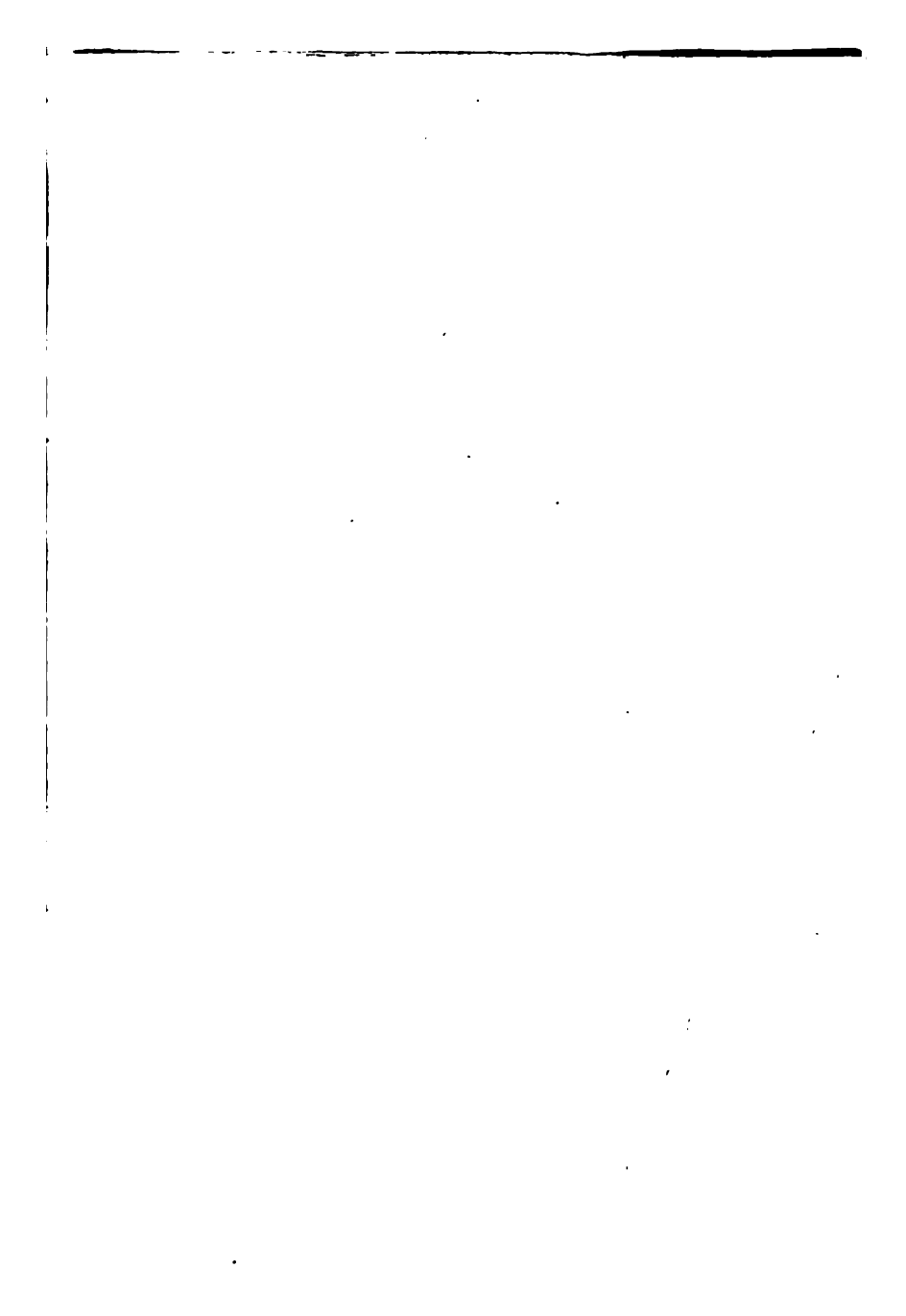
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